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New creative network will give grants to Aroostook County artists

by **Paul Bagnall**

March 29, 2023



Ceramic artisan Brianna Gerrish stands beside her finished ceramic work at her home studio in Caribou on March 24. Gerrish's work can be purchased at Morning Star Art and Framing on Main Street in Presque Isle. Credit: Paul Bagnall / The Star-Herald

PRESQUE ISLE, Maine — The Maine Arts Commission has launched the Aroostook Creative Network, northern Maine's first collaborative for artists, performers and crafters.

The commission will fund [micro-grants for artists](#) living and working in The County, who can apply for up to \$1,000 for their creative projects. Presque Isle's [Wintergreen Arts Center](#) will administer the grants.

The network aims to connect artists and small art communities across Aroostook County's wide expanse. Artists will be able to interact with others who share the same environment, without having to travel south to more urban areas, according to a Maine Arts Commission member.



Malachai Couture, an 18-year-old musician from Mars Hill browses guitars at King Morton's Hall of Music on Main Street in Presque Isle on March 24. Credit: Paul Bagnall / The Star-Herald

"I think there's a real sense of place and identity that people and artists in Aroostook County kind of draw from and inspire them," said Sheila Jans of Madawaska, the commission's regional development director. "There is a collective Maine experience of art."

The inspiration and model for the Aroostook Creative Network came from the traditional arts group [Mayo Street Arts in Portland](#), which gave micro-grants to immigrant communities in the area, Jans said.

The network will welcome varied artisans, like painters, crafters, textile artists, musicians or other performers. Grant applicants must live and work in Aroostook County, and if successful can use the funds for art supplies, creative development like an arts symposium or preparation for exhibits or craft shows.

The commission wants to spread out its funding to reach artists in their own environments, Jans said. A regional arts organization like the County network will be familiar with what its

artists need.

The Maine Arts Commission approached Wintergreen Arts Center a couple of months ago with a new strategy to work locally, rather than have artists come to the commission in Augusta, said Dottie Hutchins, Wintergreen's executive director.

AROOSTOOK ART AND CULTURE REVIVAL EFFORTS



New writers' room in honor of Maine artist helping to boost Aroostook's cultural revival



by [Paula Brewer](#)

November 6, 2022

Wintergreen is centrally located in Aroostook County and has a deep connection with local artists. It offers programs for both children and adults.

"Wintergreen has a long relationship with the Maine Arts Commission, but what [the Commission] is trying to do is get to individual artists," Hutchins said.

Hutchins and Jans helped form the Aroostook Creative Network advisory committee. Other members are Kristen Wells of Hodgdon, a nonprofit and community development consultant; Brian Theriault, a traditional artist and snowshoe maker from Fort Kent Mills; and Gretchen Violette, Wintergreen Arts Center's program coordinator.

Hutchins hopes the network will attract other grants and organizations that will support Aroostook arts and culture. Artists can apply for micro-grants through the Wintergreen Arts website until May 30.



Ceramic artisan Brianna Gerrish stands works on her next ceramic project in her home studio in Caribou on March 24. Gerrish's work can be purchased at Morning Star Art and Framing on Main Street in Presque Isle. Credit: Paul Bagnall / The Star-Herald

Caribou ceramic artist [Brianna Gerrish](#) already plans to apply for a grant, and thinks a network dedicated to artists who embrace The County's values will be valuable.

"There's more of a reliance on nature and our surroundings, being from such a rural area, a farming area, a community that is dependent on the land," Gerrish said. "The artists in the [Aroostook] area really reflect that appreciation for their surroundings."

Gerrish works on her ceramics out of her home studio in Caribou. Her family moved to Caribou when she was 4 years old. She attended the Maine School of Science and Mathematics in Limestone and received her bachelor's in fine arts in ceramics from the University of Maine at Presque Isle.

If Gerrish gets a micro-grant, she'll use the funding to repair her kilns at her studio. Her goal is to help ceramics evolve into a big draw for the Caribou area and make it an artistic destination.

“To be able to make the work and finish the work here will allow me to really blossom and grow with what I am doing as opposed to having to travel outside of The County,” Gerrish said.

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